Market-led and market-critical approaches to urban planning in the city of Porto Alegre

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Porto Alegre, the southernmost capital of Brazil, has experienced considerable changes in terms of its agenda in urban planning during the recent decades. The city is worldwide known for the pioneer experience of the Participatory Budget and for hosting many editions of the World Social Forum. It recently hosted FIFA World Cup 2014 matches. In terms of urban planning policies, hosting a mega sports event opened up the opportunity to strengthen managerialism, and particularly, to introduce urban entrepreneurialism (Harvey, 1989) and city marketing strategies (Kotler, Haider, and Rein, 1994) to transform the city with the aim of competing in the Brazilian and Mercosul scenarios. Eighteen Large Urban Projects (LUPs) were conceived under this framework. Out of those, fourteen were related to urban mobility, two to stadia, and two to waterfront regeneration. However, it must be noted that, out of those eighteen LUPs, only twelve were related to the Responsibility Matrix. The other six, including one stadium and the waterfront regeneration projects, arose from the opportunity of investments that being a World Cup host city represents (Oliveira, 2013; Rovati, 2015).

During the process, different kinds of difficulties and resistances emerged, and not all LUPs have been implemented or completed so far.

In this paper, we are especially interested in discussing different hypotheses on the reasons why the several LUPs did not progress as expected. The research is based on official documentation, newspapers, municipality official website, and others. Many authors believe that LUPs are an important and necessary tool in the contemporary urban planning agenda (Borja, Castells, 2004; Busquets, 1995; Lecroart, Palisse, 2007; Acher, 1992; Avitable, 2005). However, others have a critical view on these policies, which are aligned with neoliberal approaches, stating that LUPs are only a tool that transforms the city into a commodity (Vainer, 2000). LPUs are rather an

intervention (Ferreira, 2010), and not a properly planned project to transform the city in a better place for its citizens live; it is the expression of urban planning based on outcomes (Sanchez, 2014).

In the case of Porto Alegre, three different kinds of market-led urban planning approaches, focused on “correcting inefficiencies while supporting market processes” (Brindley; Rydin; Stoker, 2004, p.9), were identified. Those categories are: trend planning, leverage planning, and private-management planning.

Trend planning represents a “head-on challenge to the existing regulative style, attempting to re-orientate it to a private-sector perspective” (Brindley; Rydin; Stoker, 2004, p.16). These authors believe it is an explicit introduction of market criteria into development control decision. Leverage planning is focused on stimulating the market; its essential ingredient is “the use of public-sector finance to stimulate a weak market and to release a greater volume of private-sector investments” (Brindley; Rydin; Stoker, 2004, p.20). In LUPs, in particular, this is related to public-private partnership practices, public investments on clearing sites, provision of urban infrastructure, and exempting the private sector from fees and taxes. This approach can be also related to an urban entrepreneurial approach. Finally, private-management planning consists in “handing over the management of the role renewal process to the private sector” (Brindley; Rydin; Stoker, 2004, p.23). According to those authors, this goes beyond leverage planning, as it “draws in not only private-sector financial resources, but also the managerial methods, skills, and experience of the provide sector” ” (Brindley; Rydin; Stoker, 2004, p.23).

Despite the efforts of the Municipality of Porto Alegre to put into practice this entire set of market-led strategies, the private sector has not invested as expected. Important LUPs have not been completed, including the two waterfront renewal projects, subway line 2, a couple of roads underpasses, and many others. There were multiple causes, such as no entrepreneurs interested in the biddings, underestimated budgets, resistance the projects by social movements, legal impediments, and lack in planning and management.

We formulate three hypotheses, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The first is related to a possible crisis in the market-led approach and in the neoliberal

model on transformation of the cities into “the golden path to the urban survival” (Harvey, 1989, p.10). The second hypothesis discusses the current impossibility of applying the global cities model (Sassen, 2010) to a peripheral city such as Porto Alegre. The third hypothesis considers the possibility of the emergence of a new urban planning approach based on a market-critical view.

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